



P.O. Box 70 • Polson, MT 59860
406-883-1346
Fax: 406-883-1357
lakers@flatheadlakers.org
www.flatheadlakers.org
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Flathead Lakers:
*Working for clean water, a healthy
ecosystem, and lasting quality of
life in the Flathead Watershed.*

Montana House Appropriations Committee
State Capitol
Helena, Montana

Re: HB 189

Dear Chairman Sinrud and members of the Committee:

As President of the Flathead Lakers, I write in support of House Bill 189, a bill that would fund activities to help defend the Flathead Lake watershed from coal mining in British Columbia.

The Flathead Lakers is a 1,300-member, nonprofit, grassroots organization which has been working for 48 years to protect water quality in Flathead Lake and its watershed.

Flathead Lake and its tributaries are magnificent and valuable Montana assets, treasured by Montanans and our many visitors. These clean waters are critical for fostering and sustaining economic prosperity.

The lake and its headwaters in the North Fork Flathead River now face the greatest threat to their integrity since the Cabin Creek coal mine was proposed 30 years ago, just across the international border in British Columbia. The new threat is the Lodgepole coal mine, proposed and financed by Ontario-based Cline Mining Company (with partners from Japan and Germany). Located in the headwaters of the North Fork Flathead watershed about 25 miles northwest of Glacier National Park, the mine would produce two million metric tons of coal per year for export to China. The mine would convert a mountain ridge into a pit more than two miles long. The coal would go to China, the profits to Ontario, and the pollution would go south, toward Montana.

We are very concerned that British Columbia's review of the proposed coal mine is moving forward with too narrow of a focus. The draft terms of reference for evaluating the mine do not require sufficient baseline data collection and ignore the potential cumulative impacts of several large coal mines in the North Fork watershed. Yet, the Lodgepole is not the only coal deposit in the Canadian Flathead. If this mine at the head of the drainage is developed, it will become progressively easier to finance the infrastructure for mines that follow. Indeed, the Lilyburt prospect, which is closer to the border, already is under exploration. It is crucial that Montana, and British Columbia, have the information needed to fully understand the risks of coal mining in the Flathead.

HB 189 will equip the Flathead Basin Commission with tools needed to protect Flathead waters. The Commission was created over 20 years ago to address the ramifications of the proposed Cabin Creek mine. The efforts of the Commission then succeeded in referring the issue to the International Joint Commission. The IJC unanimously concluded that the mine would injure Montana's aquatic resources, and recommended the mine not be permitted. The mine was never developed. The current Lodgepole Mine proposal brings with it today the same threats.

HB 189 will help assure that Montana has a legally and scientifically defensible baseline record of water quality and other resource values in the North Fork Flathead River watershed and will support Montana's capacity to effectively respond to British Columbia coal development proposals.

I strongly urge you to support HB 189. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Barz
President